
Addressing Global Health Needs: Augustinian Values in Action

by **M. Louise Fitzpatrick**, Ed.D., R.N., F.A.A.N.
*Connelly Endowed Dean and Professor of Nursing,
College of Nursing*

Many educational institutions prepare excellent professional nurses for clinical practice while providing a sound foundation for continued career development. Among those that identify themselves as Catholic, there exists an implicit assumption that in preparing individuals for nursing careers, we are fostering the formation of strong human values. This is particularly the case in undergraduate education; it is somewhat less well defined in the realm of graduate programs and second degree options that enroll adults. While celebrating the many things we have in common with nursing programs in other Catholic colleges and universities, Villanova's College of Nursing is distinctive among them. The claim is not made out of arrogance. It is, in fact, directly related to the College's conscious attention to its identity as an institution rooted in the Catholic tradition that teaches with an emphasis on bringing to life and extending the Augustinian charism to the academic community and the world in which we live.

Villanova and its College of Nursing seek to promote a particular climate for teaching and learning that will support the development of attitudes, behaviors, knowledge and skills necessary for professional and personal success in the complex world of contemporary health care. Our program outcomes in the College of Nursing reflect a process that goes beyond the norm. The transformational experience of the student is a consequence of our explicit intention to cultivate an understanding and appreciation for the community itself and the importance of educating the heart as well as the mind.

Nursing by its very nature is compatible with the values of an Augustinian university. Concern for the whole person — demonstrated in the caring aspects of practice that respond to the physical, psychological



and spiritual needs of patients — places nursing in a natural position to foster the values that make the Villanova educational experience distinctive. However, the transformation that occurs within the student is neither a magical happening nor a guaranteed outcome. It is the product of a design, intentionality and hard work. It begins with the orientation of faculty and students to Villanova’s mission and the Augustinian values and themes that characterize the learning environment both within the classroom and throughout the campus’ myriad activities. It involves modeling for students; it requires integration of concepts, values and themes into the academic program in deliberate ways which may appear to have unplanned consequences, but, which in fact, are carefully crafted so that they become permanently woven into the fabric of the experience. While maintaining and encouraging academic freedom and a respect for difference, a framework of values, attitudes and behaviors creates the context for student learning and for teaching. Because inclusiveness is a prominent value, the experience is outer-directed, never insular nor limited to the campus community.

Students who come to Villanova to study nursing, irrespective of program or age, are not blank slates. Even the youngest freshman is a product of 17 or 18 years of learning and growing. We attempt to introduce students to the mission, heritage and values of our tradition as an invitation to become a contributing member of the community. We seek to discover the special gifts and talents of students and encourage them to share those gifts with the community. Developing an early relationship with the nursing faculty, all of whom serve as academic advisors or,

While celebrating the many things we have in common with nursing programs in other Catholic colleges and universities, Villanova’s College of Nursing is distinctive among them.

more accurately mentors, is frequently the first step. The advisor’s role goes well beyond program planning and scheduling. The advisor is the student’s primary resource on career options, summer work experiences and the development

of a career trajectory. As the student progresses in the program, the advisor increasingly assumes the role of professional mentor. Operating from a background of experience in the discipline, the advisor can guide, recommend and readily respond to the student’s experience as it relates to classroom work and, even more significantly, to clinical practice. At the conclusion of the bachelor’s degree program, the advisor knows the student well enough to be an effective career counselor and reference for those

seeking employment and preparing to take the licensing examination. It is not unusual for students and their advisors to develop friendships and lifelong bonds.

Students' individual talents and interests always remain central to the educational mission. In developing students' professional knowledge and skills, we naturally focus attention on the pursuit of truth for its own sake. Strong emphasis is placed on the exposure to the ideas that emerge from students' acquaintance with other disciplines and bodies of knowledge and on the practical applications of such knowledge. Because nursing is an applied discipline, this becomes an important ingredient in assisting students to process information, to think inductively and deductively, to test and apply theory to practice, to make definitive clinical judgments and to critique and utilize research findings for the improvement of patient care. Therefore, we believe that courses in the humanities and the natural and social sciences are central not only because they are functional and provide a foundation for the nursing major, but because they are essential to the transformation of the student into a liberally educated, intellectually curious person and critical thinker.

Among the most important outcomes of the nursing education experience at Villanova are those that reflect a fusion between competencies based in knowledge and skills and those reflective of caring, compassion and empathy. We assume that the good that exists in our students can be nurtured and stimulated through the formation of professional behaviors directed at maintaining, restoring and promoting the health of others. The development of an attitude of mind and heart that transforms the content and science of nursing practice into a healing art is the hallmark of a Villanova nursing education.

Students experience a wide variety of learning opportunities in the classroom, laboratory and clinical settings. Utilization of contemporary technology in both the learning process and the practice of patient care does not diminish the intimacy of the nurse-patient relationship, nor does it render learning routine and impersonal. Learning experiences that may not be possible in a direct, first-hand fashion can be simulated or experienced via various media and electronic means to provide for equivalent learning opportunities.

Nursing students have a distinct advantage because all of their clinical learning is service learning. The fact that nursing practica are largely living laboratories (hospitals, clinics, patients' homes and numerous other places

continued on page 33

Life of Service; Life of Love Amy Gardner '03

Although service is at the very heart of the nursing profession, Amy Gardner '03 took it to a much higher level. Most service programs involving Villanovans include Habitat for Humanity projects, serving at a soup kitchen or mentoring children. Gardner has done all these and by the time her senior year rolled around she realized that she wanted to do a full year of volunteer service. "This is something that has been important to me for some time," said Gardner. "I know some friends who had done community service and decided it was something I wanted to do."

When she chose to apply to Holy Family Birth Center in Weslaco, Texas, located 11 miles north of the Mexican border, the Rhode Island native faced a cultural shock, endured a large climate differential and was plunged into learning conversational Spanish very quickly.

In July 2003, dubbing her arrival to Holy Family a "baptism by fire," she was quickly immersed in the nurses' primary duties. They include prenatal visits with clinic patients, assisting in labor and delivery, managing clinics, and handling administrative duties. "We serve as post-partum nurses, well-baby nurses, and home visit nurses. We go out to the patients' homes on the third and 10th day after delivery and check on the mothers and infants. We examined the babies until they were one year old and administered all their immunizations. We are also engaged in child birth education. We taught classes to pregnant women on the process of labor, delivery, breast feeding, parenting and baby care. I also do some outreach work in the community. I gained some grant-writing experience and visited high schools to teach health classes about fetal development, prenatal care or other things the students

required. The duties range pretty far and wide and everyone participated in the chores that keep the clinic and community operational."

One memorable event that happened during her senior year was being the first nursing student to write a senior thesis as part of the Honors Program. The title speaks

volumes about the challenges in nursing: "Care Without Words at the Global Bedside: Intercultural Nonverbal Communication in Transcultural Nursing," a study that grew out of an experience she was afforded in Japan. "Dr. Nancy Sharts-Hopko was my academic advisor, so I met her on my first day as a little wide-eyed freshman. In senior year, she also became my thesis advisor. I cannot thank her enough for all her help and support," she noted.



Amy Gardner '03 (center)

Amy's year of service in Texas ended on July 1 and she is looking forward to practicing her skills at a nearby hospital in the Rio Grande Valley she has come to love. Eventually she would like to become a family nurse practitioner and pursue a master's degree in public health. "I feel my future will be in places that need care. The driving force for me being a nurse is to work with and help marginalized populations. Nursing and community service go hand-in-hand. This year has really cemented that conviction." After earning the master's degrees, "I'd love to get involved in research and also gain some international experience. Eventually my long-term goal is to be a professor. I want to get involved in research and academics."

Sages through the years have encouraged us to live our dreams, and Gardner has a well-planned itinerary that will serve to meet her goals.

—Holly Stratts

continued

where health care and health education are provided) is the single most important characteristic of nursing education and one that supports transformational learning through the real and lived experience.

Many of these practica involve the planning and delivery of health care to diverse communities. Direct face-to-face contact with individuals different from themselves causes students to confront their beliefs, their biases and their values. Learning to respect and appreciate difference is essential. It occurs through contact with people at all levels of health and illness, of all races, religions, ages, ethnic and cultural groups, intellectual capacities, life styles and economic levels. Throughout the student experience, care settings are selected not only to encourage the application of nursing theory and science to practice but also to insure involvement with a diverse and multicultural population. Faculty teaching in these settings bring these multiple perspectives into focus as each new-patient care situation unfolds. Similarly, learning experiences are designed to raise student awareness about the responsiveness of the health care system to the needs of disenfranchised individuals and groups that require care.

Study abroad experiences in many parts of the world, as well as interaction with international students who study nursing with us at Villanova, provide additional opportunities to appreciate differences and to challenge preconceived ideas. Transfer of learning from these nursing-related study-abroad experiences to those of patient care in the United States are important to the transformational process and to the successful attainment of educational goals and outcomes of the nursing students' education.

Also prominent among the objectives of a nursing education at Villanova are concern and care for the poor and marginalized, which extends beyond providing professional care in the clinical setting.

What we try to achieve in our students is a profound understanding of the roots of poverty and injustice and a capacity to act to minimize and ultimately eradicate them within the framework of Catholic Social Teaching. It is not only the valuable clinical experience and insights gained

What we try to achieve in our students is a profound understanding of the roots of poverty and injustice and a capacity to act to minimize and ultimately eradicate them within the framework of Catholic Social Teaching.

through a nursing practica in Chulucanus, Peru, rural Texas or the inner city of Philadelphia that matter, but the role these opportunities play as catalysts in motivating our graduates to take social and political action, to volunteer their time and talents, or to choose employment in situations that extend beyond direct-patient care and require willingness to confront the political and economic systems that lead to poverty and illness. There are numerous examples of our alumni who serve as volunteers at home and abroad, as part of their

personal commitment which mirrors Villanova's mission. Exemplars for the students are not only our alumni but our faculty, many of whom volunteer on a weekly basis at free clinics, shelters, soup kitchens and community centers or who join mission projects like Operation Smile that take them to Third World countries where they provide health care and encouragement for the less fortunate. This is role modeling at its best, encouraged and enhanced by the numerous co-curricular service activities sponsored by our Division of Student Life and Campus Ministry.

Sensitivity to the needs and concerns of others is essential to nursing practice, but it must be taught and promoted—not just assumed to be a natural attribute of those who choose nursing as a career. In a society where altruism has diminished, nurturing these feelings and reinforcing behaviors that reflect sensitivity and concern are essential strategies of teaching. Cultivating attitudes of heart and mind that engender empathic responses on the part of the nurse are critical to the education of the student, if learning is to take place. Transforming the person into a professional practitioner who not only exercises appropriate and competent clinical judgments and behaviors but who merges these into a seamless practice characterized by respect, love and concern for the patient and the larger community is the transformation that our College of Nursing tries to achieve. Doing so implies the development of a mature spirituality on the part of the nursing stu-

It [the transformation] involves modeling for students; it requires integration of concepts, values and themes into the academic program in deliberate ways which may appear to have unplanned consequences, but, which in fact, are carefully crafted so that they become permanently woven into the fabric of the experience.

dent and recognition of the spirituality of those who are the recipients of nursing care. It places emphasis on affective learning as well as on the intellectual rigors of academic life. Like all learning, it implies behavioral change that can be assessed and demonstrated. The outcomes of the educational process are the criteria by which we judge our accomplishments and our continuing challenges.

The distinctiveness of a Villanova Nursing education is, without question, a consequence of the uncompromised commitment of our College's administration, faculty and staff to a rigorous and transformational educational process. The individual responsibility of faculty combines with the corporate accountability of the College to provide nursing programs that have earned a reputation for graduating nurses who are liberally educated, clinically expert and committed to service.